

# Memorandum



**Date:** August 18, 2006

**To:** Department Directors

**From:** George M. Burgess  
County Manager

**Subject:** Tuition Refund Program

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "G. Burgess", written over the printed name of George M. Burgess.

In March 2006, at the request of the Employee Relations Department (ERD), the Office of the Inspector General (OIG) initiated an investigation of the Miami-Dade County Tuition Refund Program (Attached). The focus of this investigation was to determine whether County employees who participate in this program fail to report accurate and appropriate financial aid information at the time of reimbursement.

Yesterday, I received an interim report from the OIG dated August 16, 2006 regarding the findings of its investigation. The report indicates that the records of over 200 employees have been reviewed and it has been determined that fraudulent information was submitted by 58 employees resulting in overpayments totaling \$140,829. As the OIG continues its investigation of the remaining 1,300 employee records, it is anticipated that additional findings will emerge.

For almost 43 years, the Tuition Refund Program has provided a wide range of opportunities to thousands of employees to improve their job effectiveness through additional training and higher-learning education. However, for this program to continue, I expect reforms to be implemented immediately. This is a generous employment benefit that should be valued and not abused. The administrative order and program application clearly delineate the requirements and responsibilities for disclosure of scholarships and grants of all employees who take advantage of this benefit.

Effective immediately, I am directing each of you to review internal tuition refund procedures in accordance with Administrative Order 7-4 to ensure proper compliance. Currently, employees are required to submit documentation of their degree program requirements, coursework schedule, any financial aid documents, official grades, and tuition invoice before reimbursement is provided. Prospectively, I am requiring that employees must provide a certified form of payment for the courses outlined in the tuition refund reimbursement form, i.e. cancelled checks, copies of money orders, credit card statements or any other payment form.

Prior to releasing any tuition refund reimbursement form to ERD, you are required to review each employee's application and documentation to determine that accurate and truthful information has been submitted by the employee. I am attaching additional information to assist you in developing proper administrative procedures and encourage you to visit ERD's website at [www.miamidade.gov/emprel/tuition\\_refund.asp](http://www.miamidade.gov/emprel/tuition_refund.asp) for additional information on the County's Tuition Refund Program.

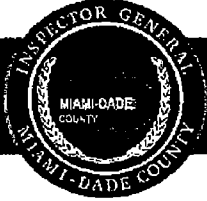
In order to provide employees with due process and an opportunity to respond to these findings, the OIG will be notifying each employee, in writing, providing a 15-day response period. At the conclusion of this investigation, ERD will then provide each department director with a list of employees who have

been found to have reported fraudulent information. The unethical behavior and actions of County employees involved in this investigation will not be tolerated.

If you require additional information regarding the County's Tuition Refund Program please contact Donald S. Allen, Director, Employee Relations Department at 305-375-1589.

Attachments

c: Murray Greenberg, County Attorney  
Assistant County Managers  
Christopher Mazzella, Inspector General  
Harvey Ruvin, Clerk of Courts  
ERD Senior Staff  
Departmental Personnel Representatives



# Memorandum

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Phone: (305) 375-1946 ♦ Fax: (305) 579-2656  
visit our website at [www.miamidadeig.org](http://www.miamidadeig.org)

To: George Burgess, County Manager  
From: Christopher Mazzella, Inspector General  
Date: August 16, 2006  
Subject: Miami-Dade County - Tuition Refund Program

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Please find attached the Office of the Inspector General's interim report regarding the above-captioned matter.

Thus far, our inquiry has found significant financial and oversight problems with this program and, as such, we are bringing this matter to your attention.

cc: The Honorable Carlos Alvarez, Mayor  
The Honorable Joe A. Martinez, Chair, Board of County Commissioners  
The Honorable Katherine Fernandez Rundle, State Attorney  
Mr. Donald Allen, Director – Employee Relations Department  
Ms. Alina Hudak, Assistant County Manager

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*Interim Report Re: Tuition Refund Program*

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**SYNOPSIS**

In early March 2006, at the request of the Employee Relations Department (ERD), the Office of the Inspector General (OIG) opened an investigation of the Miami-Dade County Tuition Refund Program (program). The program provides county employees the opportunity to enroll in any state or private university or school of higher learning, even high-end institutions, such as the University of Miami School of Law and Harvard University. The Tuition Refund Program refunds participants up to 50% of their tuition costs through taxpayer dollars. This is a very generous program by anyone's standard. The only requirement is that the employee obtain a "C" grade to receive reimbursement. Nevertheless, after completing an independent review in 2005, ERD had concerns that a substantial number of Miami-Dade County employees participating in the program were not reporting their additional grants and scholarships to the County in accordance with the program requirements. The additional grants, if reported, would have reduced allowable tuition refunds and, consequently, the cost to the taxpayer substantially.

The OIG has compiled a list of over 1500 county employees who are currently, or who have recently participated in the program. To date, the OIG has reviewed records relating to over 200 employee participants. Of these 200 participants, 58 (29%) have either cheated or misled the County by their failure to report the appropriate financial aid to ERD. Their actions have cost the County, thus far, \$140,829.52 in overpayments to these employees. **Furthermore, of these 58 participants, 20 (34%) have received funds which provided them with more than 100% of their actual tuition costs. In other words, they actually profited by their failure to report the appropriate information to the County.** As the investigation continues, the OIG expects that these numbers will rise exponentially. The OIG is also coordinating this matter with the Miami-Dade State Attorney's Office.

In the interim, the OIG recommends that the County department heads be reminded by the County Manager to adhere to the requirements of A.O. 7-4, particularly as this A.O. mandates that department directors be held responsible for administering all aspects of the program. Further, as my office reports its findings on individual cases, appropriate administrative action should be considered, including the restitution of County taxpayer funds, as required by the A.O. For your information, several departments such as the Miami-Dade Police Department and the Clerk of the Courts have adequate administrative controls in place or are taking steps to tighten up the verification process. ERD has also indicated that it is looking at ways to stop the abuse.

**BACKGROUND**

The Miami-Dade County Tuition Refund Program was approved by the Board of County Commissioners in 1963. The program was created to encourage county

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employees to improve their job effectiveness and prepare them for increased responsibilities in county government by receiving additional training and education. Eligible employees may earn certificates, undergraduate, and advanced degrees, such as Masters Degrees in Business, Public Administration and Law Degrees, which relate directly to career opportunities within Miami-Dade County. The institutions from which the degree is earned must be an accredited institution. The program has refunded \$9.3 million to Miami-Dade County employees since the year 2000.

In accordance with Administrative Order (A.O.) 7-4 (**EXHIBIT 1**), all county employees are eligible for participation in the program after completion of 13 pay periods of full-time employment with the County. Employees who take "approved" coursework and achieve a grade that is "C" or higher from an accredited institution, which recently has included on-line internet schools, are eligible for a refund of 50% of tuition costs upon completion of the course. All employees receiving reimbursement are obligated to remain in the County employ for a minimum of one (1) year following the completion of the coursework.

A.O. 7-4 and the program's Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) sheet, provides strict guidelines regarding the accounting of grant and scholarship monies to the eligible refundable amount:

Employees receiving financial assistance including scholarships, fellowships, grants and/or Veteran's benefits (excluding student loans) will be eligible for 50% of tuition costs *after* the financial assistance has been applied to the tuition cost. (Emphasis added by the OIG)

In other words, the employee is eligible to a 50% refund of his/her actual out-of-pocket costs.

To participate in the program, the employee must submit a request for a refund on the appropriate application form (currently form 108.01-66 6/05 entitled *Tuition Refund Program Application for Coursework/Degree Approval*). (**EXHIBIT 2**)<sup>1</sup> This form must be submitted to the employee's department director for coursework/degree approval no later than thirty days from the start of classes for each term. Each application should include information regarding financial aid received by the student/employee for that particular term. It should be noted that on the front of every application is the heading "Statement of Disclosure" which is signed by every participant when an application is submitted for approval. This statement certifies that

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<sup>1</sup> Prior to June 2005, form 108.01-66 10/95 was utilized by participants. (**Exhibit 3**) It should be noted that until May 2006, both forms were accepted by ERD for reimbursement.

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no additional financial assistance is applied to the employee's tuition costs. On the backside of every application form, the qualifications section includes the above statement regarding the accounting of grant and scholarship monies to the eligible refundable amount relating to the reporting of grants and other financial assistance.

All approved applicants will submit a request for reimbursement, along with tuition receipts, official grade notifications, and all supporting documentation to their department's director or designated representative. The department's representative is responsible for reviewing the paperwork and either approving or disapproving the request, which is then forwarded to ERD for processing no later than thirty days from the receipt of the grades.

The County's ERD provides various avenues for county employees to obtain information regarding the program. The Miami-Dade County website provides a link to the program webpage which gives employees access to a complete overview of the program. This webpage includes links to the A.O., the Tuition Refund Application, and allows the employee to "ask a question" directly to ERD. **(EXHIBIT 4)** According to Ms. Constance Butler, Director, Career Development Division, ERD also conducts a training segment on the program as part of the mandatory "Employee Orientation Training" required for all new county employees and also in the mandatory supervisory training for all new and upcoming supervisors. Ms. Butler's office is also responsible for the training of each Departmental Personnel Representative (DPR)/tuition coordinator. All program updates are sent to the department directors as well as provided to DPR's at quarterly meetings. In addition, there is a program committee which convenes monthly to discuss policies and issues relating to the program and an Appeals Board where an employee may appeal an action taken by the tuition coordinator or department director.

**FINANCIAL AID/ASSISTANCE (Excluding Loans)**

By way of background, students typically apply for financial aid by completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). This application is used for all federal and state student grants and loans, excluding scholarships and fellowships. Once this information is processed, the student will then receive an award letter or other notification from the college or university they are attending, which will disclose all of the financial aid/assistance that will be awarded to them for each term/semester.

The OIG investigation is focusing on the application of grants, scholarships, fellowships and Veteran's benefits to the actual cost of tuition (essentially, free money). In the course of the investigation, the OIG has been exposed to a multitude of financial aid/assistance sources. Financial aid/assistance means any federal, state or private funds that assist the student financially to obtain a higher education. Financial aid/assistance can be categorized

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as state, federal or private, need based or non-need based, institutional or non-institutional. The A.O. requires that all of this information be provided by the employee along with each application submitted for a refund, so that the appropriate refund can be calculated.

It is further stated under A.O. 7-4 "Penalties" that:

Should an employee submit documentation which the employee knows is false or intentionally misleading in order to receive benefits for which the employee is not entitled, the employee will be deemed ineligible to continue to participate in the tuition reimbursement program and ***must repay Miami-Dade County for any tuition reimbursement received while in the County's employment.*** The employee may be subject to further disciplinary action, including, but not limited to, dismissal from the County service. (Emphasis added by the OIG)

In short, this section of the A.O. requires the County to recover all taxpayer funds, not just overpayments, but all tuition refund monies received by any county employee from the time they entered the program.

**INVESTIGATION**

The OIG opened an investigation into the program in March 2006, at the request of ERD. The purpose of this investigation is to provide a complete review of the program, including participants who were in the program beginning in the year 2005. In April 2006, the OIG sent a letter to all county department directors requesting a list of the program participants within their departments. The responses from this letter provided the OIG with over 1500 county employees who are currently, or who have recently participated in the program. These employees are enrolled in over 60 colleges, universities, schools, technical schools and institutes (including on-line internet courses and programs) to obtain a degree or certificate through the program.

To date, the OIG has obtained records relating to county employees who are attending Barry University, Nova Southeastern University and St. Thomas University. These schools make up approximately 28% of the total program participants. Records relating to over 200 employee participants have been reviewed by the OIG, revealing that of these 200 participants, 58 (29%) have mislead or cheated the County by failing to report the appropriate financial aid to ERD, which would include grants, scholarships, fellowships and/or Veteran's benefits. The failure of these employees to report this information to ERD, as required by A.O. 7-4, has, thus far, cost the County \$140,829.52 in overpayments to these employees. As noted earlier, the OIG expects that these numbers will rise exponentially.

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The investigation has also provided insight as to the role of the County departments in the oversight of the program. According to A.O. 7-4, under the heading of *Department Director*, it says:

The Department Director shall be responsible for verifying that all approved coursework is in compliance with Administrative Order 7-4, as well as all other aspects of the program.

Furthermore, under the heading of *Coursework Degree Review and Approval*, the A.O. states:

The Department Director shall approve or disapprove the employee's request after verifying the employee's eligibility for participation in the program.

Lastly, under the heading *Reimbursement*, the A.O. stipulates:

All approved applicants will submit a request for reimbursement, along with tuition receipts, official grade notification, and all supporting documentation, to their Department Director no later than thirty days from the receipt of the grades. The Departments shall submit to the Tuition Refund Coordinator all applications, whether approved or disapproved, with supporting documents for final review and reimbursement approval.

**IN SUMMARY and MOVING FORWARD**

By virtue of the A.O. itself, as stated above, department directors clearly have a responsibility to oversee the compliance of the program and should be held accountable for any lack of departmental oversight or noncompliance by their employees.

That being said, the onus to report any financial assistance clearly rests with the employees themselves. Every employee who participates in the program should be held accountable for compliance with the program. Our investigation has already identified 58 (29%) out of 200 who have cheated the County out of money they were not entitled to receive. There is ample information available through the County website, through the participant's individual departments, through ERD and, most particularly, on the "Tuition Refund Program Application for Coursework/Degree Approval" form, which is signed and submitted repeatedly by every participant, to be informed of the program requirements and policies. Finally, each student receives notification of their financial aid/assistance from the college or university they are attending.



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As noted earlier, the A.O. clearly states under the heading **Penalties:**

Should an employee submit documentation which the employee knows is false or intentionally misleading in order to receive benefits for which the employee is not entitled, the employee will be deemed ineligible to continue to participate in the tuition reimbursement program *and must repay Miami-Dade County for any tuition reimbursement received while in the County's employment.* The employee may be subject to further disciplinary action, including, but not limited to, dismissal from the County service. (Emphasis added by OIG.)

The Tuition Refund Program has been around for several decades offering educational opportunities to thousands of county employees while costing the County taxpayers millions of dollars. No doubt, it is a program offered to county employees and not available to the public at large. As such, county employees should be unmistakable in recognizing this program as a privilege. Yet even in the early stages of this investigation, the OIG can see that this program has been corrupted by some dishonest county employees and is plagued by a lack of oversight by a number of departments. Permitting employees to operate on the honor system without proper oversight and verification just does not work. There must be greater scrutiny and verification by management of all documentation provided by the participants.

As the investigation progresses, the OIG will be preparing individual reports for those participants whose files we have reviewed and who we have determined did not appropriately report their financial aid. These individualized reports will highlight the findings of each investigation. Those under review will be (or already have been) invited to voluntarily meet with OIG Special Agents prior to the issuance of a written report. This meeting will allow them the opportunity to discuss any improprieties in their tuition refund documentation. In accordance with our responsibilities under the County Code, individualized draft reports will be provided to those under review where we have determined that reporting improprieties occurred. Those receiving OIG draft reports are given an opportunity to provide a written response. Thereafter, the OIG will issue a final report in each case and will attach the participant's response, if received. These reports will, in turn, be forwarded to the director of ERD for distribution to the County department heads for appropriate action. Those cases befitting prosecution will also be referred to the appropriate agency.

## **Administrative Order**



**Administrative Order No.: 7-4**

**Title:** Tuition Refund Program

**Ordered:** 11/6/2003

**Effective:** 11/16/2003

### **AUTHORITY:**

Section 4.02 of the Miami-Dade County Charter and Section 2.28 of the Miami-Dade County Code.

### **SUPERSEDES:**

This Administrative Order supersedes Administrative Order No. 7-4, dated July 25, 1995.

### **POLICY:**

It is established County policy, approved by the Board of County Commissioners on August 27, 1963, to promote a program encouraging County employees to improve their effectiveness by obtaining additional training. This program provides that employees enrolled in accredited educational institutions may be reimbursed for 50% of tuition costs, for approved coursework which will enable them to improve their performance in their current positions and prepare them for increased responsibilities.

Tuition is the fee for instruction and lab fees only, and does not include textbooks, exams, audit fees, or any other expenses.

### **QUALIFICATIONS:**

All employees who take "approved" coursework and achieve a grade that is "C" or higher and is acceptable by the school as a passing grade, will be entitled to a refund of 50% of tuition costs upon completion of the course.

Employees receiving financial assistance including scholarships, fellowships, grants, and/or Veteran's benefits, will be eligible for a refund of 50% of tuition costs after the financial assistance has been applied to the tuition costs.

## **ELIGIBILITY OF EMPLOYEE:**

All full-time career employees are eligible for participation in the Tuition Refund Program if the following requirements are met:

- (a) Completion of 13 pay periods of full time employment with the County.
- (b) An overall evaluation of "satisfactory" or higher on the latest employee performance evaluation preceding the beginning of classes.

Exception: An employee whose latest overall evaluation is less than "satisfactory" may be eligible for Tuition Refund for coursework that relates to specific areas of weak performance.

- (c) Exempt employees must have received a satisfactory rating from their supervisors on the latest performance review.

## **ELIGIBILITY OF COURSEWORK:**

Guidelines for establishing eligible coursework are as follows:

- (a) Degree and certification programs at accredited institutions which relate directly to career opportunities within Miami-Dade County are eligible for approval.
- (b) For those employees who have been approved for a degree program, all general education courses specifically required by the school will be approved.
- (c) All other coursework will be considered on a course by course determination.
- (d) Employees who have applications on file on the effective date of this Administrative Order, and who otherwise meet eligibility requirements, shall have their applications considered herewith.
- (e) All courses must be taken outside of working hours unless the employee's Department Director approves the use of annual leave, compensatory time, or holiday leave. If Administrative Leave is granted to take a course during working hours, no Tuition Refund will be granted.
- (f) On-line Internet courses and programs provided by accredited Florida-based educational institutions are eligible for tuition reimbursement. For on-line Internet courses and programs at accredited educational institutions not based in Florida, the Tuition Refund Appeal Board will review requests for reimbursement on a

case-by-case basis. The Employee Relations Department must receive such requests at least 30 days prior to the start of the course or program.

#### **TUITION REFUND COORDINATOR:**

The Employee Relations Department Tuition Refund Coordinator shall maintain program oversight responsibilities to include the following:

- (a) Resolve any problems or discrepancies with the interpretation of Administrative Order 7-4.
- (b) Review all supporting documents submitted by the departments to ensure proper accountability for refund disbursement.
- (c) Calculate the 50% refund.
- (d) Approve and submit all refund requests for final disbursement.
- (e) Resolve problems and issues affecting the program.
- (f) Process appeals as required.

#### **DEPARTMENT DIRECTOR:**

The Department Directors shall be responsible for verifying that all approved coursework is in compliance with Administrative Order 7-4, as well as all other aspects of the program. Department Directors shall approve or disapprove all reimbursements for degrees, programs, and coursework for employees within their departments in accordance with Tuition Reimbursement Program policies and procedures.

#### **OBLIGATION:**

All employees receiving reimbursement under this program will be obligated to remain in the employ of the County for a minimum of one (1) year following completion of the coursework. Employees terminating from the County service prior to the expiration of this period will reimburse the County for refunds received during the final year of employment through deductions from their final payroll check. If the final paycheck is insufficient, the employee will still be responsible for the reimbursement. No reimbursement will be required of those employees who have been laid off and have been previously approved for coursework. If the employee is deceased, no reimbursement will be required from the family of the employee.

**APPLICATION PROCEDURE:**

Unless otherwise indicated in this Administrative Order, employees desiring to participate in the Tuition Refund Program shall submit to their Department Director an application for coursework/degree approval no later than thirty days following the start of classes.

**COURSEWORK DEGREE REVIEW AND APPROVAL:**

The Department Director shall approve or disapprove the employee's request after verifying the employee's eligibility for participation in the program.

**(a) For Approval**

After the Department Director approves the request, a copy of the original application is returned to the employee advising them of the approval.

**(b) For Disapproval**

If the Department Director disapproves the application, he or she shall advise the employee of the reason for the rejection no later than 30 days from the date of the receipt of the application.

**REIMBURSEMENT:**

All approved applicants will submit a request for reimbursement, along with tuition receipts, official grade notifications, and all supporting documentation, to their Department Director no later than thirty days from the receipt of the grades. The Departments shall submit to the Tuition Refund Coordinator all applications, whether approved or disapproved, with the supporting documents for final review and reimbursement approval.

**PENALTIES:**

Should an employee submit documentation which the employee knows is false or intentionally misleading in order to receive benefits for which the employee is not entitled, the employee will be deemed ineligible to continue to participate in the tuition reimbursement program and must repay Miami-Dade County for any tuition reimbursements received while in the County's employ. The employee may be subject to further disciplinary action, including, but not limited to, dismissal from the County service.

**APPEALS:**

Any applicant may appeal the action taken by the Tuition Refund Coordinator or the Department Director by submitting a written statement to the Coordinator within 30 days from the day of the action describing how and why the course in question is in compliance with the guidelines and intent of the program. The Tuition Refund Appeal Board will convene on a monthly basis as necessary to review all appeals. This committee shall consist of three permanent members: a representative from the Employee Relations Department Career Development Division; Personnel Services Division; and Administrative Services Division. The Coordinator shall be responsible for notifying the applicant of the Appeal Board's decision.

This Administrative Order is hereby submitted to the Board of County Commissioners of Miami-Dade County, Florida.

George M. Burgess  
County Manager

## **Tuition Refund Appeal Board**

The Tuition Refund Appeal Board convenes on a monthly basis as necessary to review all appeals. This committee consists of twelve (12) members of which three are permanent:

- Donald Allen – Director, Employee Relations Department
- Connie Butler – Director, Career Development Division (ERD)
- Geoffrey Martin – Director, Labor Management & Employee Appeals (ERD)
- Jay Flynn – Director, Administrative Services (ERD)
- Leo Arnaiz – Director, Office Human Resources (COC)
- Annetta Nelson – Fire Rescue Personnel Manager (MDFR)
- Geneva Hughes – Personnel Manager (FIN)
- Rina Gomez – Employee Development Specialist 3 (ERD)
- Lorna Martin-Spencer – Manager, Personnel & Procurement Services (DBD)
- Juan Armas – Manager, Training & Development (MDHA)
- Melanie McLean – Personnel Payroll Operations Coordinator (ERD)
- Reinaldo Valdes – MDCU Program Coordinator (ERD)



# TUITION REFUND PROGRAM APPLICATION FOR COURSEWORK/DEGREE APPROVAL

SECTION A  
DEGREE APPROVAL

Last Name	First Name	Initial	Social Security #	Work Ph. Number	School Name
Department	Dept./Div./Loc.# ____/____/____	Employee Status Code	Date of Hire	Date Classes Start	Date Classes End
Attach a copy of the curriculum <u>listing all degree requirements</u> if this is the initial request for degree approval. If degree approval has been received on prior tuition refund application, please provide <b>date of approval</b> _____.					
<b>TITLE OF DEGREE/PROGRAM SOUGHT</b> _____ <b>MAJOR</b> _____ Estimated Program Cost \$ _____					
Approved _____ Disapproved _____ Department Director Signature _____ Print Name _____					

SECTION B  
COURSEWORK APPROVAL

To be completed by the employee (complete this section for all coursework)										Department use only				Employee Relations Department use only		
Course Code #	Complete Course Title	Credit Hrs.	Tuition Cost (TC)	Financial Aid Amount (Attach award letter)		Course *			County Related (Circle One)	Coursework Approval		Dept. Dir./ Designee Initials	Date	Grade	Refund Amount (50% of TC minus Grants)	Refund Date
				Loan	Grant	U	G	O		App.	Dis.					

\*U – Undergraduate, G – Graduate, O – Other

<b>TOTAL COST</b> \$ _____	<b>TOTAL REFUND</b> \$ _____
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Explain how this coursework or attainment of this degree will further the achievement of your career goals within Miami-Dade County. Attach additional sheets if necessary.

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## STATEMENT OF DISCLOSURE

It is my intent to remain employed with Miami-Dade County for a minimum of one year following completion of this coursework. If I terminate prior to the expiration of this period, I will reimburse the County for funds received during the final year of employment through my final paycheck. If the final paycheck is insufficient, a repayment schedule will be established. No reimbursement will be required for lay-off situations. Also, in signing this form, I certify that no other educational financial assistance (excluding student loans) such as scholarships, fellowships, grants, and/or veterans benefits is being applied toward payment of the tuition costs indicated above, and I authorize Miami-Dade County to obtain access to my Financial Aid records at \_\_\_\_\_ (name of Educational Institution). I understand that failure to **strictly comply with these mandatory financial disclosures and any misrepresentation of any of the information contained in this application shall result in the denial of tuition refund and may result in criminal prosecution and/or disciplinary action up to and including dismissal from the County service.**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Applicant                      Date

## VERIFICATION OF SATISFACTORY PERFORMANCE EVALUATION

This is to certify that the above-mentioned employee is a full time career employee with the completion of 13 pay periods of full time employment with the County and an overall performance evaluation of "Satisfactory" or higher on the latest performance evaluation preceding the beginning of classes applied for on this application. In the event an employee has not received at least a "Satisfactory" evaluation, explain briefly how course will improve their performance.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Immediate Supervisor                      Date

DATE \_\_\_\_\_ REFUND DISBURSEMENT APPROVAL  
DATE \_\_\_\_\_ INCOMPLETE (PENDING INFORMATION)

\_\_\_\_\_  
SIGNATURE OF COORDINATOR



## **TUITION REFUND PROGRAM**

### **POLICY**

In accordance with Administrative Order 7-4, the Tuition Refund Program was established to encourage County employees to improve their effectiveness by obtaining additional training. The program provides 50% of tuition costs for approved coursework which will enable employees to improve their performance in their current positions, prepare them for increased responsibilities, and provide opportunities for career advancement within Miami-Dade County.

### **ELIGIBILITY**

All full-time career employees with completion of 13 pay periods of full time employment with the County who have achieved an overall evaluation of "Satisfactory" or higher on the latest employee performance evaluation preceding the beginning of classes are eligible to participate in the program. Exception: an employee whose overall evaluation is less than "Satisfactory" may be eligible if coursework is related to specific area of weak performance. Exempt employees must have received a satisfactory rating from their supervisors on the latest performance review.

### **QUALIFICATIONS**

All employees who take "approved" coursework and achieve a grade that is "C" or higher and is acceptable by the school as a passing grade, will be entitled to a refund of 50% of tuition costs upon completion of the course. Where no grade is given, a certificate of "passing", "satisfactory", or "completed" will be accepted. Employees receiving financial assistance including scholarships, fellowships, grants, and/or Veteran's benefits will be eligible for 50% of tuition costs after the financial assistance has been applied to the tuition cost.

### **TUITION COSTS**

Tuition is the fee for instruction and does not include text books, exams, audit fees, or any other expenses.

### **HOW TO OBTAIN REFUND**

1. Complete the reverse side of this form and submit with attachments (Degree program requirements, coursework schedule, deferred payment and financial aid documents when applicable) to your immediate supervisor no later than 30 days following the start of classes.
2. No later than 30 days from the receipt of your grades, submit your tuition invoice and official grade notification to your Departmental Personnel Representative (DPR).
3. You will receive reimbursement within approximately four weeks after all requirements are satisfied and documents are received by the Program Coordinator, Employee Relations Department.

Contact your Departmental Personnel Representative for any questions related to the program.

## TUITION REFUND PROCESSING CHECK LIST



- ☐ Tuition Refund Application filled out correctly and in its entirety
- ☐ Tuition Refund Application received no later than 30 days from receipt of grades.
- ☐ DPR verifies employee meets criteria for refund.  
Please circle appropriate area(s)
  - a. Employee has been employed for six (6) months or more/13 pay periods of full time employment with the County.
  - b. Employee has a satisfactory or higher rating on overall performance evaluation for six months prior to application for refund.
  - c. Employee has not received a performance evaluation/supporting documentation stating satisfactory performance from employee's supervisor.
  - c. Employee with less than satisfactory rating on six months evaluation is doing coursework related to his/her specific areas of weak performance.
- ☐ DPR completes "Section B"
  - ☒
  - ❖ County related
  - ❖ Coursework approval
- ☐ Documentation attached:
  - Receipt of payment for coursework (must indicate if grants, financial aid and/or loans were received for payment of coursework).
  - Documentation of grades received for coursework
- ☐ Tuition Refund Application, receipt for payment of tuition, and documentation of grades forwarded to Director or designee for approval.
- ☐ Tuition Refund Application with supporting documentation forwarded to Administrative Services for processing on \_\_\_\_\_

Date

Completed by \_\_\_\_\_

# REFUND

50% refund of tuition cost

QUESTIONS	YES	NO	REMARKS
<b>Administrative Leave</b> granted to take a course during working hours.		✓	
<b>Audit Fees</b>		✓	
<b>Certification Programs</b> at accredited institution related directly to career opportunities with Miami-Dade County	✓		
<b>Coursework</b> taken during working hours.		* ✓	*Unless Director approves annual, holiday or compensatory time.
<b>Degree Programs</b> at accredited institution related directly to career opportunities within Miami-Dade County	✓		
<b>Educational Leave</b>		✓	
<b>Fellowships Funding</b>		* ✓	Refund of 50% of tuition costs <u>after</u> Fellowship Funding assistance has been applied to tuition costs.
<b>Grade "C"</b> or higher is entitled to tuition refund.	✓		
<b>Grants received</b>		* ✓	Refund of 50% of tuition costs <u>after</u> Grants received have been applied to tuition costs.
<b>INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS (Books, Video etc)</b>		✓	
<b>Lab Fees</b>	✓		
<b>On-line Internet Courses &amp; Programs</b> provided by accredited <b>FLORIDA BASED</b> educational institutions.	✓		
<b>On-line Internet Courses &amp; Programs - Non-Florida Based</b>	*	*	*Reviewed on a case-by-case basis.
<b>Plus Fees</b>	✓		Fees that are related to registration.
<b>Veteran's Benefits</b>		*✓	*Refund of 50% of tuition costs <u>after</u> Veteran's benefit has been applied to tuition costs.

## Frequently Asked Questions

- Q. If Administrative Leave is granted to take a course during working hours, do I get Tuition Refund?**
- A. NO, all courses must be taken outside of working hours unless the employee's Department Director approves the use of annual leave, compensatory time, or holiday leave. If Administrative Leave is granted to take a course during working hours, no Tuition Refund will be granted.
- Q. Do Audit Fees qualify for Tuition Refund?**
- A. No, only degree and certification programs at accredited institutions which relate directly to career opportunities within Miami-Dade County are eligible for Tuition Refund.
- Q. Do Certification Programs qualify for Tuition Refund?**
- A. YES, degree and certification programs at accredited institutions which relate directly to career opportunities within Miami-Dade County are eligible for Tuition Refund.
- Q. Do Degree Programs qualify for Tuition Refund?**
- A. YES, degree and certification programs at accredited institutions which relate directly to career opportunities within Miami-Dade County are eligible for Tuition Refund.
- Q. What is "Tuition Cost"?**
- A. Tuition Cost is the fee for instruction and does not include text books, exams, audit fees, or any other expenses.
- Q. How is the Tuition Refund amount calculated?**
- A. Fifty Percent of Tuition Cost minus Grants (excluding student loans).
- Q. Do I qualify for Tuition Refund if I fail a class?**
- A. All employees who take "approved" coursework and achieve a grade that is "C" or higher and is acceptable by the school as a passing grade, will be entitled to a refund of 50% of tuition costs upon completion of the course. Where no grade is given, a certificate of "passing", "satisfactory", or "completed" will be accepted.
- Q. What would the Tuition Refund amount be if I receive grants?**
- A. Employees receiving financial assistance including scholarships, fellowships, grants, and/or Veteran's benefits (excluding student loans) will be eligible for 50% of tuition costs after the financial assistance has been applied to the tuition cost.
- Q. Do Lab Fees qualify for Tuition Refund?**
- A. No, Tuition Refund does not include text books, exams, audit fees, or any other expenses.
- Q. Do Internet Courses and Programs qualify for Tuition Refund?**
- A. On-line Internet courses and programs provided by accredited *Florida-based* educational institutions are eligible for tuition reimbursement.
- Q. Does an Internet Course/Program offered by an educational Institution not based in Florida qualify for Tuition Refund?**
- A. The Tuition Refund Appeal Board will review requests for reimbursement on a case-by-case basis for on-line Internet courses and programs at accredited educational institutions not based in Florida. The Employee Relations Department must receive such requests at least **30 days prior to the start** of the course or program.
- Q. Do I get Tuition Refund for Plus Fees?**
- A. Yes, if these fees are related to registration and are charged to do the coursework.
- Q. Do I get Tuition Refund if scholarships are applied toward coursework?**
- A. No, employees receiving financial assistance including scholarships, fellowships, grants, and/or Veteran's benefits (excluding student loans) will be eligible for 50% of tuition costs after the financial assistance has been applied to the tuition cost.

## Frequently Asked Questions

**Q. Do I get Tuition Refund if Veteran's benefits are applied toward a coursework?**

**A.** No, employees receiving financial assistance including scholarships, fellowships, grants, and/or Veteran's benefits (excluding student loans) will be eligible for 50% of tuition costs after the financial assistance has been applied to the tuition cost.

**Q. What would happen if I resign from my county job in less than a year after completing my coursework?**

**A.** All employees receiving reimbursement will be obligated to remain in the County for a minimum of one (1) year following completion of the coursework. Employees terminating from the County service prior to the expiration of this period will reimburse the County for refunds received during the final year of employment through deductions from their final payroll check. If the final paycheck is insufficient, the employee will still be responsible for the reimbursement.

**Q. Will I have to reimburse the County if I was laid off within a year of the receipt of Tuition Refund?**

**A.** No, reimbursement will be required of those employees who have been laid off and have been previously approved for coursework.

**Q. How long does it take to receive the Tuition Refund?**

**A.** Employees will receive reimbursement within approximately four weeks after *all* requirements are satisfied and documents are received by the Program Coordinator, Employee Relations Department.

